REMARKS

These amendments and remarks are in response to the Final Office Action dated December 17, 2009. This response is accompanied by a Request for Continued Examination. Applicant requests a three-month extension of time and authorization is given to charge all appropriate fees to Deposit Account No. 50-0951.

At the time of the Office Action, claims 1-7 were pending. In the Office Action, claims 1-7 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a). The rejections are discussed in more detail below.

I. Rejections to the claims based upon Art

Claims 1-5 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over PCT Publication No. WO02/074,427 to Bedetti ("*Bedetti*") in light of U.S. Patent No. 2,635,684 to Joscelyne ("*Joscelyne*"). Claim 6 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over *Bedetti* and *Joscelyne*, in light of U.S. Patent No. 3,836,611 to Mavrovic ("*Mavrovic*".) Claim 7 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over *Bedetti* and *Joscelyn* and *Mavrovic*, in light of U.S. Patent No. 4,338,878 to Mason et al. ("*Mason*"). Claim 1 is patentable over these references.

In this respect, it is noted that the passage mentioned in the Office Action at page 9, lines 10-14 of *Bedetti*, merely relates to an air flow fed to a same, single container 12 with the aim of forming and supporting therein a fluid bed of granules and at the same time cooling (consolidating) the granules, which are wetted with a growth liquid in the upper portion of container 12 and rotate within the fluid bed in a cylindrical vortex motion. This passage of *Bedetti* is related to the specific embodiment of figure 5, wherein the granules leave the container 12 by gravity and are directly collected on moving belt 17 (see for instance page 10, lines 7-16). This embodiment excludes and is in contrast with the provision of a second fluid bed for cooling the granules arranged in series with respect to the first bed, in which both beds are fed by a same air flow.

There is no incentive for a person of ordinary skill in the art to modify this embodiment in order to improve cooling or to maximize heat recovery since this embodiment is not faced with these problems and there is thus no reason to operate the *Bedetti* system with a second fluid bed for cooling the granules fed by a same flow of air. This is clear from the structure of the embodiment

of figure 5, in which the air flow A fed to the container 12 also should have the function of "classifying" the granules (see page 10, lines 17-21), and a moving belt 17 for collecting the granules is arranged immediatcly below the container 12.

In addition, *Bedetti* cannot and would not be combined by a skilled person with thc disclosure of *Joscelyne* because *Joscelyne* is related to a totally different if not opposite technical field. Indeed, as already explained in the response to the previous Office Action, *Joscelyne* is related to the specific technical field of prilling, in which granules (generally called prills) are obtained through solidification of liquid droplets by a flow of dry air. To further clarify that the present claims relate to a method and apparatus for growing granules based upon solid seeds, claims 1 and 3 have been amended by inserting the term "solid" before "seeds".

As it is clear from the previous discussion and the submissions set forth in Applicant's previous communication, thc apparatus of *Joscelyne* is not conceived for and it is not suitable to carry out the granulation process of present claim 1. Furthermore, the apparatus of *Joscelyne* does not disclosc or suggcst a distributor device for solid seeds and at least one distributor-supplier device for granule growth liquid substance as claimed in present claim 3.

For the above reasons, the subject matter of claims 1 and 3 are patentable over the cited prior art. Similar arguments apply to dependent claims 2 and 4-7, which are belicved to be allowable because of their dependence upon an allowable base claim, and because of the further features recited. All claims are thus believed to relate to patentable subject matter, and to be in condition for allowancc.

II. Conclusion

Applicants have made every effort to present claims which distinguish over the prior art, and it is thus believed that all claims are in condition for allowance. Nevertheless, Applicants invite the Examiner to call the undersigned if it is believed that a telephonic interview would expedite the prosecution of the application to an allowance. In view of the foregoing remarks, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and prompt allowance of the pending claims.

Respectfully submitted,

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